A LONELY FLUTE

ODELL SHEPARD

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A LONELY FLUTE

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BY

ODELL SHEPARD

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TO

M. F. S.

And now 't was like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song
That makes the Heavens be mute.

COLERIDGE.

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A LONELY FLUTE

A LONELY FLUTE

PROEM

Beyond the pearly portal,
  Beyond the last dim star,
Pale, perfect, and immortal,
  The eternal visions are,
That never any rapture
  Of sorrow or of mirth
Of any song shall capture
  To dwell with men on earth.

Many a strange and tragic
  Old sorrow still is mute
And melodies of magic
  Still slumber in the flute,
Many a mighty vision
  Has caught my yearning eye
And swept with calm derision
  In robes of splendor by.

PROEM

The rushing susurration
  Of some eternal wing
Beats mighty variation
  Through all the song I sing;
The vague, deep-mouthed commotion
  From its ancestral home
Booms like the shout of ocean
  Across the crumbling foam;
And these low lyric whispers
  Make answer wistfully
As sea-shells . . . dreaming lispers
  Beside the eternal sea.

LAUS MARIÆ

THERE is a name like some deep melody
Hallowed by sundown, delicate as the plash
Of lonely waves on solitary lakes
And rounded as the sudden-bursting bloom
Of bold, deep-throated notes in a midnight cloud
When shadowy belfries far away roll out
Across the dark their avalanche of sound.

It is a wild voice lost in the wail of the wind;
The silvery-twinkling plectrum of the rain
Plays in the poplar tree no other tune
And pines intone it softly as a prayer
In leafy litanies.
The name is raised
Even to God's ear from ancient arches dim
With caverned twilight and dull altar smoke
Where tapers weave athwart the azure haze
Innumerable pageantries of dusk.

Low-voiced and soft-eyed women must they live
Who bear that holy name. And now for one

Time has no other honor than to be
The meaning of an unremembered rhyme,
The breath of a forgotten singer's song.

(*October*, 1903)

RECOLLECTION

I MUST forget awhile the mellow flutes
And all the lyric wizardry of strings;
The fragile clarinet,
Tremulous over meadows rich with dawn,
Must knock against my vagrant heart
And throb and cry no more.

For I am shaken by the loveliness
And lights and laughter and beguiling song
Of all this siren world;
The regal beauty of women, round on round,
The swift, lithe slenderness of girls,
And children's loyal eyes,

Hill rivers and the lilac fringe of seas
Lazily plunging, glow of city nights
And faces in the glow —
These things have stolen my heart away, I lie
Parcelled abroad in sound and hue,
Dispersed through all I love.

RECOLLECTION

I must go far away to a still place
And draw the shadows down across my eyes
  And wait and listen there
For wings vibrating from beyond the stars,
  Wide-ranging, swiftly winnowing wings
  Bearing me back mine own.

So soon, now, I shall lie deep hidden away
From sound or sight, with hearing strangely dull
  And heavy-lidded eyes, —
'T is time, O passionate soul, for me to go
  Some far, hill-folded road apart
  And learn the ways of peace.

NIGHTFALL

In a crumbling glory sets
The unhastening sun;
The fishers draw their shining nets;
The day is done.

Across the ruddy wine
That brims the sea
Black boats drag shoreward through the brine
Dreamily,

And dark against the glow
Firing the west,
By three and two the great gulls go
Seaward to rest.

Beneath the gradual host
Of heaven, pale
And glimmering, rides a dim sea-ghost,
A large slow sail.

NIGHTFALL

Slowly she cometh on
Day's last faint breath,
Drifting across the water, wan
And gray as death.

From what far-lying land
Swimmeth thy keel,
Dim ship? And what mysterious hand
Is at thy wheel?

What far-borne news for me?
What vast release?
Quiet is in my heart, and on the sea
Peace.

(*Balboa, California*)

A BALLAD OF LOVE AND DEATH

She winded on the castle horn,
  She clamored long and bold,
For she was way-spent and forlorn
  And she was sore a-cold.

And she stood lonely in the snow.
  Vague quiet filled the air. . . .
From heaven's roof looked down aloof
  The stars, with steady stare.

She heard the droning drift of snow
  And the wolf-wind on the hill. . . .
No other sound. . . . For leagues around
  The night was very still.

She cried aloud in sudden fright,
"Open! Warder ho!
Here is a pilgrim guest to-night
  Who can no farther go."

The steady beat of mailèd feet
In angry answer rang
Along the floor. The castle door
Gave in with iron clang

And the warder strode into his tower
And saw her standing there
Weary, like a storm-tossed flower,
And, like an angel, fair.

"Here is no lodging for the night,
No bread and wine for thee,
No ingle bright, no warm firelight,
No cheerful company.

"Here is no inn nor any kin
Of thine to harbor guest,
Nor thee to house will any rouse
Out of his ancient rest."

Unearthly, dark, nocturnal things
With faint and furtive stir
Hovered on feather-muffled wings
Round the fair face of her

As she made answer wearily:
"Ah! open now the gate.
Though I was fleet with willing feet,
I have come very late.

"Yea, though I came through flood and flame,
Through tempest, flood, and fire,
And left the wind to trail behind
The wings of my desire,

"And though I prayed the stars for aid
And seas for wind and tide,
And though God gave me goodly pave
And ran, Himself, beside . . .

"Aye, though my feet have been thus fleet,
Unto one heart, I know,
Whose sleep is still beneath the hill,
My coming has been slow."

And he bent gently down above,
A soft light in his eye . . .
"Is not the holy name of Love
The name men call thee by?

A BALLAD OF LOVE AND DEATH

"Ah, Love, I know thee, for thy face
Is other-worldly fair;
A great light of some heavenly place
Is on thy shining hair.

"But thou, Love, who canst tread the stars,
Whose seat is by God's throne,
Why wilt thou bend thee to the dust
And walk the dark alone?

"Thy ways are not our mortal ways.
Hast thou nought else to do
Than wander with thy dream-lit face
Our glimmering darkness through?"

But Love made answer, and her voice
Was as God's voice to him;
As tall and fair she towered there
As heavenly seraphim . . .

"Open the gate! for Love shall dwell
Even among the dead
And in the darkest deeps of hell!
Open! For God hath said!"

BIRDS OF PASSAGE

Dropping round and clear across the still miles,
Ringing down the midnight's marble stair,
A bird's cry is falling through the darkness,
Falling from the fields of upper air.

Through the rainy fragrance of the April night
Slow it falls, circling in the fall,
And all the sheeted lake of sleeping silences
Is troubled by the solitary call.

Each human heart awake knows the loneliness
Of that strange voice clear and far,
That lost voice searching through the midnight,
That lonely star calling to a star.

Old memories are thronging through the darkness . . .
Slow tears are blinding sleepless eyes . . .
O lonely hearts remembering in the midnight!
O dark and empty skies!

WASTE

Reluctant, groping fog crept gray and cold
Up from the fields where now the guns were still;
Far off the thundering surge of battle rolled
And darkness brooded on the quiet hill;
Clearly, across the listening night, the shrill
And rhythmic cry of a lonely cricket fell
On ears long deafened by the scream of shot and shell.

And there were two who listened wistfully
To that glad voice, that sad last voice of all,
Who on the morrow after reveille
Would make no answer to the muster call;
Others would eat their mess, others would fall
When the lines formed again into their places,
And soon their marching comrades would forget their faces.

One moaned a little and the other turned
Painfully sidewise, peering up the bare

Shell-furrowed slope. Then, while his deep wound
burned,
He crawled, slow inch by weary inch, to where
The boy lay, — young, he thought, and strangely
fair.
"You see, I came," he said. "It was a wrench.
I thought I'd die. Let's have a light here. What!
You 're French!

"No matter . . . we 'll be going pretty soon . . .
Dying 's a lonesome business at the best,
And when there 's nothing but a ghastly moon
And fog for company, I lose my zest.
There 's a girl somewhere . . . well . . . you know
the rest.
I 'm glad I came. It 's hand in hand now, brother.
I think I laid you here. I wish 't had been an-
other.

"I never meant it, and you did n't mean
For me this ugly gash along my side.
Something has pushed us on. Our slate is clean.
And long and long after we two have died
Some learnedest of doctors will decide

What thing it was. But we . . . we 'll never know.
Our business now 's to help make next year's
harvest grow.

"You 've been at school? Collège de France! You
know
Next year I should have heard your Bergson
there, —
Greatest since Hegel. Think of Haeckel, though,
At my own Jena! Mighty men they were.
Not mighty enough for what they had to bear.
They read and wrote and taught, but you and I,
How have we profited at last? Well, here we lie.

"If I had known you by the silver Rhine,
That dreamy country where I had my birth,
The land of golden corn and golden wine
And surely, I think, the world's most lovely
earth, —
I should have loved you, brother, and known your
worth.
But you were born beside the racing Rhone.
Ah, yes, that made the difference. That thing
alone.

"We might have fronted this world's stormy
weather
Hand clasped in hand and seeing eye to eye.
What was there we could not have done together?
Who dares to say we should have feared to die,
Shoulder to shoulder standing, you and I?
But now you are slain by me, your unknown
friend.
I die by your unknowing hand. This . . . this is
the end!

"And all the love that might have been is blown
Far off like clouds that fade across the blue;
The game is over and the night shuts down,
Blotting the little dreams of me and you
And all our hope of all we longed to do.
But courage, comrade! It 's not hard to die.
It 's not so lonely now. If only we know why!"

The fog-damp folded closer round the hill
And stillness deepened, but the cricket's song
Tore at the heavy hem of silence still —
One small voice left of love in a world of
wrong.

A few dim stars looked down. The yelling throng
Of guns had passed beyond the mountain's brow
When once again he spoke, but slowly, faintlier now.

"Something discovered that it did n't need us —
Me in the Fatherland and you in France.
We were less worth than what it took to feed us,
And so life gave us only a little glance.
It 's true to say we never had a chance.
It 's like this fog, around, above, below.
Reach out your hand to me. Good-night. We 'll
never know."

And then they lay so still they seemed asleep,
For death was near and they had little pain.
The midnight did not hear them moan or weep
For life and love and gladness lost in vain
And faces they would never see again, —
Old friends, old lovers. All seemed at a distance.
The minutes crept and crept. They made no strong
resistance.

They only lay and looked up at the stars,
Feeling they had not known how fair they were.

I think their hearts were far from those loud wars
As they lay listening to the cricket's chirr
Until it faded to a drowsy blur,
Dwindled, and died, lost in the distant roar
Of waves that plunged and broke on some eternal
shore.

THE WATCHER IN THE SKY

She has grown pale and spectral with our wounds
And she is worn with memories of woe
Older than Karnak. Multitudinous feet
Of all the phantom armies of the world
Resounding down the hollow halls of time,
Have kept their far-off rumor in her ear.
For she was old when Nineveh and Tyre
And Baalbec of the waste went down in blood;
Pompey and Tamburlaine and Genghis Khan
Are dreams of only yesternight to her.
And still she keeps, chained to a loathsome thing,
Her straining, distant paces up and down
The vaulted cell, but wistful of an end
When all our swarm of shuddering life shall drop
Like some dead cooling cinder down the void,
Leaving her clean, in blessed barrenness.

(*August*, 1914)

HOUSEMATES

This little flickering planet
  Is such a lonely spark
Among the million mighty fires
  That blaze in the outer dark,

The homeless waste about us
  Leaves such a narrow span
To this dim lodging for a night,
  This bivouac of man,

That all the heavens wonder
  In all their alien stars
To see us wreck our fellowship
  In mad fraternal wars.

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

With a shout of trumpets and roll of drums,
Down the road the music comes
And all my heart leaps up to greet
The steady tread of the marching feet.

Blare of bugle and shriek of fife . . .
This is the triumphing wine of life!
My senses reel and my glad heart sings,
My spirit soars on jubilant wings.

Fluttering banners and gonfalons
Cover with beauty the murderous guns;
'T is sweet to live, 't were great to die
With this vast music marching by.

For all my heart leaps up to greet
The steady tread of the marching feet
When down the road the music comes
With a shout of trumpets and roll of drums.

THE HIDDEN WEAVER

THERE where he sits in the cold, in the gloom,
Of his far-away place by his thundering loom,
He weaves on the shuttles of day and of night
The shades of our sorrow and shapes of delight.
He has wrought him a glimmering garment to fling
Over the sweet swift limbs of the Spring,
He has woven a fabric of wonder to be
For a blue and a billowy robe to the sea,
He has fashioned in sombre funereal dyes
A tissue of gold for the midnight skies.

But sudden the woof turns all to red.
Has he lost his craft? Has he snapped his thread?
Sudden the web all sanguine runs.
Does he hear the yell of the thirsting guns?
While the scarlet crimes and the crimson sins
Grow from the dizzying outs and ins
Of the shuttle that spins, does he see it and feel?
Or is he the slave of a tyrannous wheel?

Inscrutable faces, mysterious eyes,
Are watching him out of the drifting skies;

THE HIDDEN WEAVER

Exiles of chaos crowd through the gloom
Of the uttermost cold to that thundering room
And whisper and peer through the dusk to mark
What thing he is weaving there in the dark.
Will he leave the loom that he won from them
And rend his fabric from hem to hem?
Is he weaving with daring and skill sublime
A wonderful winding-sheet for time?

Ah, but he sits in a darkling place,
Hiding his hands, hiding his face,
Hiding his art behind the shine
Of the web that he weaves so long and fine.
Loudly the great wheel hums and rings
And we hear not even the song that he sings.
Over the whirr of the shuttles and all
The roar and the rush, does he hear when we call?

Only the colors that grow and glow
Swift as the hurrying shuttles go,
Only the figures vivid or dim
That flow from the hastening hands of him,
Only the fugitive shapes are we,
Wrought in the web of eternity.

VANITAS

Three queens of old in Yemen
Beside forgotten streams,
Three tall and stately women,
Dreamt three great stately dreams
Of love and power and pleasure and conquering
quinqueremes.

They dreamt of love that squandered
All Egypt for a kiss,
They dreamt of fame and pondered
On proud Persepolis,
But most they yearned for the wild delights of pale
Semiramis.

They had for lords and lovers
Dark kings of Araby,
Corsairs and wild sea-rovers
From many an alien lea,—
Black-bearded men who loved and fought and won
them cruelly.

They reared a dreamlike palace
Stately and white and tall
As a lily's ivory chalice
Where every echoing hall
Was rumorous with rustling leaves and plashing water's fall.

There to the tinkling zither
And passionate guitars
They footed hence and hither
Beneath the breathless stars,
From bare round breast and shoulder waved their glimmering cymars.

Theirs was an empire's treasure
Of gems and rich attire,
Love had they beyond measure
And wine that burnt like fire;
Each stately queen in Yemen found verily her desire.

But beauty waned and smouldered,
Love languished into lust,

VANITAS

The centuries have mouldered
Their raven hair to rust,
The desert sand is over them, their darkling eyes
are dust.

Their bosoms' pride is sunken
Beneath the purple pall,
Their smooth round limbs are shrunken,
Through clasp and anklet crawl
Lithe little snakes, upon their tombs lean lizards
twitch and sprawl.

SPENSER'S "FAËRIE QUEENE"

Like some clear well of water in the waste,
Some magic well beside the weary miles,
This beauty is. I turn aside and taste
The cool Lethean drink. Suddenly smiles
A leafy world upon me, — peristyles
Of flickering shade! The hush is only stirred
Where silver runlets brighten down the aisles,
From pool to pool rehearsing one low word
Answered at drowsy intervals by a lonely bird.

Along the rustling arches and through vast
Dim caverns of green solitude are rolled
The wintry leaves of all the withered past,
One confraternity of common mould.
From summers perished, autumn's tarnished gold
Long blown to dust in many a fallen glade
Is reared this rumorous temple million-boled,
This shrine of peace, this whispering colonnade
Trembling from court to court with restless sun and shade.

And here a while may weary Fancy turn
And loiter by the rote of guttural streams.
Brushing the skirts of silence, the stirred fern
Breathes softly "hush" and "hush"—a sound
that seems
Only the fluttering sigh of deepest dreams.
Here comes no sound or sight of fevered things . . .
No sight or sound. Green-gold the daylight
beams,
And deep in the heart of dusk a far bird sings
Faint as the feathered beat of her own wavering
wings.

. . . . . .

Calm singer in the chambers of the dawn,
Our hearts are weary singing in the heat
When all thy dewy matin hopes are gone
And all thy raptures, prophesyings sweet,
And fair, false dreams are flying in defeat.
O thou, the poet's poet, from thy sky
Of ancient morning look thou down and greet
Thy brothers of the noon with gentle eye.
Lift them from out the dust. Forlorn and low they
lie!

Heart-easing poet, sing to us like bells
Across wide waters paven by the stains
Of sunset; like a vagrant breeze that swells
And rises lingering, fails and grows and wanes
Along a listening wood; like April rains
In which the anemones of dream are born.
And though you cannot save us from the pains
Of life, — the heat, the insensate noise, the scorn, —
Here may we find our rose, forget a while the thorn.

MORNING ROAD SONG

Let me have my fill of the wide blue air
And the emerald cup of the sea
And a wandering road blown bright and bare
And it is enough for me.

The love of a man is a goodly thing
And the love of a woman is true,
But give me a rollicking song to sing
And a love that is always new.

For I am a rover and cannot stay
And blithe at heart am I
When free and afoot on a winding way
Beneath the great blue sky.

EVENING ROAD SONG

It 's a long road and a steep road
And a weary road to climb.
The air bites chill on the windy hill.
At home it is firelight time.

The sunset pales . . . along the vales
The cottage candles shine
And twinkle through the early dew.
Thank God that one is mine!

And dark and late she 'll watch and wait
Beyond the last long mile
For the weary beat of homing feet
With her wise and patient smile.

WINDY MORNING

Dawn with a jubilant shout
  Leaps on the shivering sea
And puffs the last pale planet out
And scatters the flame-bright clouds about
  Like the leaves of a frost-bitten tree.

Does a gold seed split the rosy husk?
  Nay, a sword . . . a shield . . . a spear!
    The kindler of all fires that burn
    Deep in the day's cerulean urn
  Rides up across the clear
And tramples down the cowering dusk
  Like a strong-browed charioteer.

Blow out and far away
  The dim, the dull, the dun;
Prosper the crimson, blight the gray,
And blow us clean of yesterday,
  Stern morning fair begun,

Till the earth is an opal bathed in dew,
Flashing with emerald, gold, and blue,
Held where the skies wash through and
through
High up against the sun.

(*Catalina Island*, 1913)

THE GRAVE OF THOREAU

Brown earth, blue sky, and solitude, —
Three things he loved, three things he wooed
Lifelong; and now no rhyme can tell
How ultimately all is well
With his wild heart that worshipped God's
Epiphany in crumbling sods
And like an oak brought all its worth
Back to the kindly mother earth.

But something starry, something bold,
Eludes the clutch of dark and mould, —
Something that will not wholly die
Out of the old familiar sky.
No spell in all the lore of graves
Can still the plash of Walden waves
Or wash away the azure stain
Of Concord skies from heart and brain.
Clear psalteries and faint citoles
Only recall the orioles
Fluting reveille to the morn
Across the acres of the corn

THE GRAVE OF THOREAU

He wanders somewhere lonely still
Along a solitary hill
And sits by ever lonelier fires
Remote from heaven's bright rampires,
A hermit in the blue Beyond
Beside some dim celestial pond
With beans to hoe and wood to hew
And halcyon days to loiter through
And angel visitors, no doubt,
Who shut the air and sunlight out.
But he who scoffed at human ways
And, finding us unworthy of praise,
Sang misanthropic pæans to
The muskrat and the feverfew,
Will droop those archangelic wings
With praise of how we manage things,
Prefer his Walden tupelo
To even the Tree of Life, and grow
A little wistful looking down
Across the fields of Concord town.

EARTH-BORN

No lapidary's heaven, no brazier's hell for me,
For I am made of dust and dew and stream and plant and tree;
I 'm close akin to boulders, I am cousin to the mud,
And all the winds of all the skies make music in my blood.

I want a brook and pine trees, I want a storm to blow
Loud-lunged across the looming hills with rain and sleet and snow;
Don't put me off with diadems and thrones of chrysoprase, —
I want the winds of northern nights and wild March days.

My blood runs red with sunset, my body is white with rain,
And on my heart auroral skies have set their scarlet stain,

EARTH–BORN

My thoughts are green with spring time, among
the meadow rue
I think my very soul is growing green and gold
and blue.

What will be left, I wonder, when Death has
washed me clean
Of dust and dew and sundown and April's virgin
green?
If there 's enough to make a ghost, I 'll bring it
back again
To the little lovely earth that bore me, body, soul,
and brain.

"WHENCE COMETH MY HELP"

Let me sleep among the shadows of the mountains
when I die,
In the murmur of the pines and sliding streams,
Where the long day loiters by
Like a cloud across the sky
And the moon-drenched night is musical with
dreams.

Lay me down within a canyon of the mountains,
far away,
In a valley filled with dim and rosy light,
Where the flashing rivers play
Out across the golden day
And a noise of many waters brims the night.

Let me lie where glinting rivers ramble down the
slanted glade
Under bending alders garrulous and cool,
Where they gather in the shade
To the dazzling, sheer cascade,
Where they plunge and sleep within the pebbled
pool.

All the wisdom, all the beauty, I have lived for unaware
Came upon me by the rote of highland rills;
I have seen God walking there
In the solemn soundless air
When the morning wakened wonder in the hills.

I am what the mountains made me of their green and gold and gray,
Of the dawnlight and the moonlight and the foam.
Mighty mothers far away,
Ye who washed my soul in spray,
I am coming, mother mountains, coming home.

When I draw my dreams about me, when I leave the darkling plain
Where my soul forgets to soar and learns to plod,
I shall go back home again
To the kingdoms of the rain,
To the blue purlieus of heaven, nearer God.

Where the rose of dawn blooms earlier across the miles of mist,
Between the tides of sundown and moonrise,

I shall keep a lover's tryst
With the gold and amethyst,
With the stars for my companions in the skies.

UNITY

Where the long valley slopes away
Five miles across the dreaming day
A maple sends a scarlet prayer
Into the still autumnal air,
Three golden-smouldering hickories
Are fanned to flame beneath the breeze
And one great crimson oak tree fires
The sky-line over the Concord spires.

In worship mystically sweet
The rimy asters at my feet
And spiring gentian bells that burn
Blue incense in an azure urn
Breathe softly from the aspiring sod:
"This is our utmost. Take it, God, —
This chant of green, this prayer of blue.
This is the best thy clay can do."

. . . . . .

O lonely heart and widowed brain
Sick with philosophies that strain

UNITY

Body from spirit, flesh from soul, —
Worship with asters and be whole;
Live simply as still water flows
Till soul shall border brain so close
No blade of wit can thrust between
And hearts are pure as grass is green;
Pray with the maple tree and trust
The ancient ritual of the dust.

VISTAS

As I walked through the rumorous streets
Of the wind-rustled, elm-shaded city
Where all of the houses were friends
  And the trees were all lovers of her,
The spell of its old enchantment
Was woven again to subdue me
With magic of flickering shadows,
  Blown branches and leafy stir.

Street after street, as I passed,
Lured me and beckoned me onward
With memories frail as the odor
  Of lilac adrift on the air.
At the end of each breeze-blurred vista
She seemed to be watching and waiting,
With leaf shadows over her gown
  And sunshine gilding her hair.

For there was a dream that the kind God
Withheld, while granting us many —
But surely, I think, we shall come
  Sometime, at the end, she and I,

To the heaven He keeps for all tired souls,
The quiet suburban gardens
Where He Himself walks in the evening
  Beneath the rose-dropping sky
And watches the balancing elm trees
Sway in the early starshine
When high in their murmurous arches
  The night breeze ruffles by.

A NUN

One glance and I had lost her in the riot
Of tangled cries.
She trod the clamor with a cloistral quiet
Deep in her eyes
As though she heard the muted music only
That silence makes
Among dim mountain summits and on lonely
Deserted lakes.

There is some broken song her heart remembers
From long ago,
Some love lies buried deep, some passion's embers
Smothered in snow,
Far voices of a joy that sought and missed her
Fail now, and cease. . . .
And this has given the deep eyes of God's sister
Their dreadful peace.

LOVE AMONG THE CLOVER

"If you dare," she said,
And oh, her breath was clover-sweet!
Clover nodded over her,
Her lips were clover red.
Blackbirds fluted down the wind,
The bobolinks were mad with joy,
The wind was playing in her hair,
And "If you dare," she said.

Clover billowed down the wind
Far across the happy fields,
Clover on the breezy hills
Leaned along the skies
And all the nodding clover heads
And little clouds with silver sails
And all the heaven's dreamy blue
Were mirrored in her eyes.

Her laughing lips were clover-red
When long ago I kissed her there

And made for one swift moment all
My heaven and earth complete.
I 've loved among the roses since
And love among the lilies now,
But love among the clover . . .
Her breath was clover-sweet.

O wise, wise-hearted boy and girl
Who played among the clover bloom !
I think I was far wiser then
Than now I dare to be.
For I have lost that Eden now,
I cannot find my Eden now,
And even should I find it now,
I 've thrown away the key.

CERTAIN AMERICAN POETS

They cowered inert before the study fire
While mighty winds were ranging wide and free,
Urging their torpid fancies to aspire
With "Euhoe! Bacchus! Have a cup of tea."

They tripped demure from church to lecture-hall,
Shunning the snare of farthingales and curls.
Woman they thought half angel and half doll,
The Muses' temple a boarding-school for girls.

Quaffing Pierian draughts from Boston pump,
They toiled to prove their homiletic art
Could match with nasal twang and pulpit thump
In maxims glib of meeting-house and mart.

Serenely their ovine admirers graze.
Apollo wears frock-coats, the Muses stays.

THE SINGER'S QUEST

I 've been wandering, listening for a song,
Dreaming of a melody, all my life long . . .
The lilting tune that God sang to rock the tides asleep
And crooned above the cradled stars before they learned to creep.

O, there was laughter in it and many a merry chime
Before He had turned moralist, grown old before His time,
And He was happy, trolling out His great blithe-hearted tune,
Before He slung the little earth beneath the sun and moon.

But I know that somewhere that song is rolling on,
Like flutes along the midnight, like trumpets in the dawn;
It throbs across the sunset and stirs the poplar tree
And rumbles in the long low thunder of the sea.

. . . . . .

THE SINGER'S QUEST

First-love sang me one note and heart-break taught
me two,
A child has told me three notes, and soon I 'll
know it through;
And when I stand before the Throne I 'll hum it
low and sly,
Watching for a great light of welcome in His eye . . .

" Put a white raiment on him and a harp into his
hand
And golden sandals on his feet and tell the saints to
stand
A little farther off unless they wish to hear the
truth,
For this blessed lucky sinner is going to sing about
my youth!"

DEAD MAGDALEN

Cover her over with pallid white roses,
Her who had none but red roses to wear;
All that her last grim lover bestows is
Virginal white for her bosom and hair.
Cover the folds of the glimmering sheet
Clear from her eyelids weary and sweet
Down to her nevermore wayward feet.
Then They may find her fair.

Lovingly, tenderly, let us array her
Fair as a bride for the way she must go,
Leaving no lingering stain to betray her,
Letting them see we have sullied her so.
Over the curve of the fair young breast
Leave we this maidenly lily to rest
White as the snow in its snow-soft nest.
Now They will never know.

THE ADVENTURER

He came not in the red dawn
  Nor in the blaze of noon,
And all the long bright highway
  Lay lonely to the moon,

And nevermore, we know now,
  Will he come wandering down
The breezy hollows of the hills
  That gird the quiet town.

For he has heard a voice cry
  A starry-faint "Ahoy!"
Far up the wind, and followed
  Unquestioning after joy.

But we are long forgetting
  The quiet way he went,
With looks of love and gentle scorn
  So sweetly, subtly blent.

THE ADVENTURER

We cannot cease to wonder,
  We who have loved him, how
He fares along the windy ways
  His feet must travel now.

But we must draw the curtain
  And fasten bolts and bars
And talk here in the firelight
  Of him beneath the stars.

THE GOLDFINCH

Down from the sky on a sudden he drops
Into the mullein and juniper tops,
Flushed from his bath in the midsummer shine
Flooding the meadowland, drunk with the wine
Spilled from the urns of the blue, like a bold
Sky-buccaneer in his sable and gold.

Lightly he sways on the pendulous stem,
Vividly restless, a fluttering gem,
Then with a flash of bewildering wings
Dazzles away up and down, and he sings
Clear as a bell at each dip as he flies
Bounding along on the wave of the skies.

Sunlight and laughter, a wingèd desire,
Motion and melody married to fire,
Lighter than thistle-tuft borne on the wind,
Frailer than violets, how shall we find
Words that will match him, discover a name
Meet for this marvel, this lyrical flame?

How shall we fashion a rhythm to wing with him,
Find us a wonderful music to sing with him
Fine as his rapture is, free as the rollicking
Song that the harlequin drops in his frolicking
Dance through the summer sky, singing so merrily
High in the burning blue, winging so airily?

(*Mont Vernon, New Hampshire*)

ORIOLES

Wings in a blur of gold
High in the elm trees,
Looping like tawny flame
  Through the green shadows,
Now at an airy height
Pausing a heart beat
Quite at the twig's tip,
  Pendulous, bending.

Golden against the blue,
Gold in an azure cup,
Golden wine bubbling
  Out of blue goblets . . .
Cool, smooth and reedy notes
Fly low across the noon
While through the drowsy heat
  Drums the cicada.

Tropical wing and song
Bound from Bolivia . . .

All the blue Amazon
  Sings to New England. . . .
Flute-noted orioles,
Flame-coated orioles,
Gold-throated orioles,
  Spirits of summer.

BY A MOUNTAIN STREAM

WHERE the rivulet swept by a sycamore root
With a turbulent voice and a hurrying foot,
I bent by the water and spoke in my dream
To the wavering, restless, unlingering stream:
"Oh, turbulent rivulet hastening past,
For what wonderful goal do you hope at the last
That never you pause in the shimmering green
Of the undulant shade where the sycamores lean
Or rest in the moss-curtained, cool dripping halls
Hidden under the veils of your musical falls
Or loiter at peace by the tremulous fern —
White wandering waters that never return?"

And I dreamed by the rivulet's wavering side
That a myriad ripple of voices replied:
"Aloft on the mountain, afar on the steep,
A voice that we knew cried aloud in our sleep,
'Come, hasten ye down to the vale and to me,
Your begetter, destroyer, preserver, the Sea!'

We must carry our feebleness down to the Strong,
We must mingle us deep in the Whole, and ere
long
All the numberless host of the heaven shall ride
With the pale Lady Moon on our slumbering
tide."

The voices swept out and away through the door
Of the canyon, and on to the infinite shore.

Oh, vast in thy destiny, slender of span,
Wild rivulet, how thou art like to a man!

(*Cold Brook, California*, 1912)

APRIL

(To Bliss Carman)

THERE 's a murmur in the patient forest alleys,
There 's an elfin echo whispering through the trees,
Lonely pipes are lifted softly in the valleys . . .
All the air is filled with waking melodies.

From the crucibles of Erebus and Endor,
Flame of emerald has fallen by the rills,
And it flashes up the slope and sits in splendor
In the glory of the beauty of the hills.

Now my heart will yearn again to voice its wonder
And my song must sing again between the words
With a mutter of unutterable thunder
And a twitter of inimitable birds.

(April, 1903)

A CHAPEL BY THE SEA

(To Paul Dowling)

THERE 's a mouldering mountain chapel gazing out
across the sea
From beneath the lisping shelter of a eucalyptus tree
That has drawn the ancient silence from the moun-
tain's heart and fills
And subdues a fevered spirit with the quiet of the
hills.

For silvery in the morning the chimes go dropping
down
Across the vales of purple mist that gird the island
town
And golden in the evening the vesper bells again
Call back the weary fishing folk along the leafy lane.

I 'd like to be the father priest and call the folk to
prayer
Up through the winding dewy ways that climb the
morning air,

And send them down at even-song with all the
silent sky
Of early starshine teaching them far deeper truth
than I.

I 'd like to lie at rest there beneath a mossy stone
Above the crooning sea's low distant monotone,
Lulled by the lisping whisper of the eucalyptus tree
That shades my mountain chapel gazing out across
the sea.

(*Avalon, Christmas Day,* 1913)

EPHEMEROS

A FIREFLY cried across the night:
"O lofty star, O streaming light,
Clear eye of heaven, immortal lamp
Set high above the dew and damp,
Thou great high-priest to heaven's King
And chief of all the choirs that sing
Their golden, endless antiphons
Of praise before the eternal thrones —
Hear thou my prayer of worship! Thine
The glory, all the dimness mine.
I am a feeble glimmering spark
Vagrant along the lower dark."

The star called down from heaven's roof
With a humble heart and mild reproof:
"The Power that made, the Breath that blew
My fire aglow has kindled you
With equal love and equal pain
And equal toil of heart and brain.

For I am only a wandering light,
Your elder comrade in the night.
We are two sisters, you and I,
And when we two burn out and die
It will be hardly known from far
Which was the firefly, which the star."

WANDERLUST

(To Willard)

The birds were beating north again with faint and starry cries
Along their ancient highway that spans the midnight skies,
And out across the rush of wings my heart went crying too,
Straight for the morning's windy walls and lakes of misted blue.

They gave me place among them, for well they understood
The magic wine of April working madness in my blood,
And we were kin in thought and dream as league by league together
We kept that pace of straining wings across the starry weather.

The dim blue tides of Fundy, green slopes of Labrador
Slid under us . . . our course was set for earth's remotest shore;
But tingling through the ether and searching star by star
A lonely voice went crying that drew me down from far.

Farewell, farewell, my brothers! I see you far away
Go drifting down the sunset across the last green bay,
But I have found the haven of this lonely heart and wild —
My falconer has called me — I am prisoned by a child.

(*Easter Day*, 1916)

THE IDEAL

Serenely, from her mountain height sublime,
She mocks my hopeless labor as I creep
Each day a day's strength farther from the deep
And nearer to her side for which I climb.
So may she mock when for the sad last time
I fall, my face still upward, upon sleep,
With faithful hands still yearning up the steep
In patient and pathetic pantomime.

I am content, O ancient, young-eyed child
Of love and longing. Pity not our wars
Of frail-spun flesh, and keep thee undefiled
By all our strife that only breaks and mars.
But let us see from far thy footing, wild
And wayward still against the eternal stars!

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN

A LITTLE wandering wind went up the hill.
It had a lonely voice as though it knew
What it should find before it came to where
The broken body of him that had been Christ
Hung in the ruddy glow. A bowshot down
The bleak rock-shouldered hill the soldiery
Had piled a fire, and when the searching wind
Came stronger from the distant sea and dashed
The shadows and the gleam together, songs
Of battle and lust were blown along the slope
Mingled with clash of swords on cuisse and shield.
But of the women sitting by the cross
Even she whose life had been as gravely sweet
And sheltered as a lily's did not flinch.
Her face was buried in her shrouding cloak.
And she who knew too sorrowfully well
The cruelty and bitterness of life
Heard not. She sat erect, her shadowy hair
Blown back along the darkness and her eyes
That searched the distant spaces of the night
Splendid and glowing with an inward joy.

And at the darkest hour came three or four
From round the fire and would have driven them thence;
But one who knew them, gazing in their eyes,
Said: "Nay. It is his mother and his love,
The scarlet Magdalena. Let them be."
So, in the gloom beside that glimmering cross,
Beneath the broken body of him they loved,
They wept and watched — the lily and the rose.

At last the deep, low voice of Magdalen,
Toned like a distant bell, broke on the hush:
"We are so weak! What can poor women do?
So pitifully frail! God pity us!
How he did pity us! He understood . . .
Out of his own great strength he understood
How it might feel to be so very weak . . .
To be a tender lily of the field,
To be a lamb lost in the windy hills
Far from the fold and from the shepherd's voice,
To be a child with no strength, only love.
And ah, he knew, if ever a man can know,
What 't is to be a woman and to live,

Strive how she may to out-soar and overcome,
Tied to this too frail body of too fair earth!

"Oh, had I been a man to shield him then
In his great need with loving strong right arm!
One of the twelve — ha! — of that noble twelve
That ran away, and two made mock of him
Or else betrayed him ere they ran? Ah no!
And yet, a man's strength with a woman's love . . .
That might have served him somewhat ere the end."

Then with a weary voice the mother said:
"What can we do but only watch and weep,
Sit with weak hands and watch while strong men rend
And break and ruin, bringing all to nought
The beauty we have nearly died to make?

"It is not true to say that he was strong.
He did not claim the kingdom that was his,
He did not even seek for wealth and power,
He did not win a woman's love and get
Strong children to live after him, and all

That strong men strive for he passed heedless by.
Because that he was weak I loved him so . . .
For that and for his soft and gentle ways,
The tender patient calling of his voice
And that dear trick of smiling with his eyes.
Ah no! I have had dreams — a mother's dreams —
But now I cannot dream them any more.

"I sorrowed little as the happy days
Sped by and by that still the fair-haired lad
Who lay at first beside me in the stall,
The cattle stall outside Jerusalem,
Found no great throne to dazzle his mother's eye.
He was so good a workman . . . axe and saw
Did surely suit him better than a sword.
I was content if only he would wed
Some village girl of little Nazareth
And get me children with his own slow smile,
Deep thoughtful eyes and golden kingly brow.

"It seems but yesterday he played among
The shavings strewn on Joseph's work-shop floor.
The sunlight of the morning slanted through
The window — 't was in springtime — and across

The bench where Joseph sat, and then it lay
In golden glory on the boy's bright hair
And on the shavings that were golden too.
I saw him through the open door. I thought,
'My little king has found his golden crown.'
But unto Joseph I said nought at all.

"But now, ah me! he won no woman's love,
Nor loved one either as most men call love,
And so he had no child and he is gone
And I am left without him and alone."

So by her son's pale broken body mourned
The mother, dreaming on departed days.
And as with one who looks into the west,
Watching the embers of the outburned day
Crumble and cool and slowly droop and fade,
And will not take the darkling eastward path
Where lies his way until the last faint glow
Has left the sky and the early stars shine forth,
So did her dream cling to the ruined past
And all the joy they had in Nazareth
Before the years of doubt and trouble came.
Then, while loud laughter sounded up the hill

Where yet that ribald crew sang o'er the wine,
She bowed her head above her cradling arms
And softly sang, as to herself, the songs
Of Israel that once had served her well
To soothe the wakeful child.

But Magdalen
Arose upon her feet and tossed her cloak
Back from the midnight of her wind-blown hair
And lifted up her eyes into the dark
As though, beyond this circle of all our woe,
To read a hidden meaning in the stars.

"Aye, it is dark," she said. "The night comes on.
He was the sunshine of our little day.
The clouds unsettled softly and we saw
Ladders of glory climbing into light
Unspeakable, with dazzling interchange
Of Majesties and Powers. But suddenly
The tides of darkness whelm us round again
And this drear dwindled earth becomes once more
What it has ever been — a core of shade

And steaming vapor spinning in the dark,
A deeper clot of blackness in the void!

"The night comes on. 'T is hard to pierce the dark.
And if to me who loved him, whom he loved —
Though well thou sayest, 'Not as most men call love' —
Far harder will it be for those who hold
In memory no gesture of his hand,
No haunting echo of his patient voice,
Nor that dear trick of smiling with his eyes.

"O ceaseless tramp of armies down the years!
O maddened cries of 'Christ' and 'Son of Mary!'
While o'er the crying screams the hurtling death. . . .
Thou gentle shepherd of the quiet fold,
Mild man of sorrows, hast thou done this thing,
Who camest not to bring peace but a sword?
Ah no, not thou, but only our childishness,
The pitifully childish heart of man
That cannot learn and know beyond a little.

"The priests and captains and the little kings
Will tear each other at the throat and cry:
'Thus said he, lived he; swear it or thou diest!'
But these shall pass and perish in the dark
While the lorn strays and outcasts of the world,
The souls whose pain has seared their pride to dust
And burned a way for love to enter in —
These only know his meaning and shall live.

"So is it as with one whose feet have trod
The valley of the shadow, who has seen
His dearest lowered into endless night.
All music holds for him a deeper strain
Of nobler meaning, and the flush of dawn,
High wind at noonday, crumbling sunset gold,
And the dear pathetic look of children's eyes —
All beauty pierces closer to his heart.

"Yea, thou thyself, pale youth upon the cross —
The godlike strength of thee was rooted deep
In human weakness. Even she who bore thee,
Seeing the man too nearly, missed the God,
Erring as fits the mother. Some will say
In coming years, I feel it in my heart,

That thou didst face thy death a conscious God,
Knowing almighty hands were stretched to snatch
And lift thee from the greedy clutching grave.
Falsely! Forgetting dark Gethsemane,—
Not knowing, as I know, what doubt assailed
Thy human heart until the latest breath.
Ah, what a trumpery death, what mockery
And mere theatric mimicry of pain,
If thou didst surely know thou couldst not die!
Thou didst not know. And whether even now
Thy straying ghost, like some great moth of night
Blown seaward through the shadow, flies and drifts
Along dim coasts and headlands of the dark,
A homeless wanderer up and down the void,
Or whether indeed thou art enthroned above
In light and life, I know not. This I know —
That in the moment of sheer certainty
My soul will die.

"No! On thy spirit lay
All the dark weight and mystery of pain
And all our human doubt and flickering hope,
Deathless despairs and treasuries of tears,
Gropings of spirit blindfold by the flesh

And grapplings with the fiend. Else were thy death
Less like a God's than even mine may be.

"Thou broken mother who canst see in him
Only the quiet man, the needful child,
And most of all the Babe of Bethlehem,
Let it suffice thee. Thy reward is great.
Who loveth God that never hath loved man?
Who knoweth man but cometh to know God?
Thou sacred, sorrowing mother, canst thou learn —
Thou who hast gone so softly in God's sight —
Of me, the scarlet woman of old days?
Come, let us talk together, thou and I.
Apart, we see him darkly, through a glass;
Together, we shall surely see aright.
Bring thou thine innocence, thy stainless soul,
And I will bring deep lore of suffering,
My dear-bought wisdom of defeat and pain.
For out of these may come, believe it thou,
Sanctities not like thine, but fit to bear
The bitter storms and whirlwinds of this world.
Aye, out of evil often springeth good,
And sweetest honey from the lion's mouth.

And that he knew. That very thing he meant
When he withdrew me from the pits of shame.
'T is I who see God shining through the man.
I see the deity, the godlike strength
In his supreme capacity for pain.
Nor have I known the cruel love of men
These many years to err when now I say
This man loved not like men but like a God.
Thou broken mother, weep not for the child,
Mourn not the man. Acclaim the risen Christ!"

She turned and touched the other lovingly,
Then stooped and peered into her darkened face.
The mother slept, forspent and overborne
By weariness and woe too great to bear.

She gently smiled. "So it is best," she said.

Tall and elate she stood, her shadowy hair
Blown back along the darkness and her eyes
That searched the distant spaces of the night
Splendid and glowing with an inward joy.
And over that dark hill of tragedy
And triumph, victory and dull despair,

Over the sleeping Roman soldiery,
Over the three stark crosses and the two
Who loved Him most, the lily and the rose,
Shone still and clear the great compassionate stars.

THE END

NOTE

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